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SUBJECT: DR CONGO QUARTERLY REFUGEE REPORT, DECEMBER 2008

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Continued attacks from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have displaced thousands of citizens in the DRC. UNHCR estimates that there are currently over 104,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in Dungu Territory. In 2008, UNHCR reported that it assisted with the return of over 39,000 refugees back to the DRC. By the end of 2008, there are over 339,000 Congolese refugees in neighboring countries. Repatriations from the Republic of Congo have ended. Repatriations from Zambia have been temporarily suspended due to the rainy season. A final tripartite agreement between Uganda, DRC, and UNHCR has yet to be signed. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center estimates that there are currently over 1.4 million IDPs in the DRC. The current security situation in the East threatens to reverse the progress from 2008. End Summary.

Refugees Displaced by the LRA

¶2. (U) The LRA has continued to attack local villages and, according to UNHCR estimates, has displaced over 104,000 people in Dungu Territory, Province Orientale. Following the start of joint military operations against the LRA in mid-December by Ugandan, Congolese, and southern Sudanese military forces, the rebel group launched a series of attacks on civilians. The NGO Caritas estimated that over 400 civilians were killed between December 25 and 29. OCHA reported that the largest LRA attack occurred in Faradje the evening of December 25 with a death toll of 129, 225 people kidnapped, including 160 children, and 80 women raped.

Return of DR Refugees

¶3. (U) As of December 21, UNHCR had assisted 39,607 refugees to return to the DRC, of which 13,300 returned to Equateur Province, 14,743 to South Kivu Province, 11,064 to Katanga Province, and 500 to other areas in the DRC during 2008. There were no estimates available of non-assisted returns during the year.

DRC Refugees in Other African Countries

¶4. (U) UNHCR estimates 339,754 Congolese refugees are currently in other African countries. Over the last quarter of 2008, this estimate has increased by approximately 23,000 as many Congolese have fled to Uganda to escape recent fighting in North Kivu. Tanzania still has the largest share with an estimated 79,171. Zambia hosts 46,015, Rwanda 54,583, Uganda 69,950, Burundi 22,135, the Republic of Congo 13,516, and the Central African Republic 1,325. An additional 50,164 are located in other countries.

Refugees hosted by DRC

¶15. (U) According to UNHCR estimates, as of December 15, the DRC hosted 155,831 refugees from other countries, a decrease of 3,000 from the previous quarter. The largest number was from Angola with an estimated 112,203. 22,641 are from Rwanda, 17,602 from Burundi, 2,511 from Sudan, 759 from the Republic of Congo, 40 from the Central African Republic, 15 from Uganda, and 60 from other countries.

Repatriation From Zambia

¶16. (U) UNHCR reported that the repatriation of Congolese refugees in Zambia back to Pweto, Moba, and Kalemie, in Katanga Province finished, on schedule, with the arrival of the 27th convoy on December 12. Through December 15, UNHCR reported that during 2008, it facilitated the return of 11,064 Congolese from Zambia via this route. UNHCR has now temporarily suspended repatriation activities from Zambia due to the rainy season. It plans to resume in Spring ¶2009.

Repatriation From Tanzania

¶17. (U) Repatriation of Congolese refugees from Tanzania has continued slowly, but steadily. The last convoy of 2008 arrived in

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Baraka in mid-December, according to UNHCR. During 2008, UNHCR repatriated 15,551 Congolese refugees in Tanzania to the DRC via Uvira and Baraka.

Repatriation From the Republic of Congo

¶18. (U) UNHCR surpassed its 2008 goal of repatriating 12,000 Congolese from the Republic of Congo, with the repatriation of 13,300 people through December 15. UNHCR reported that virtually all of the returning refugees have chosen to return to Equateur Province. The repatriation phase has terminated and the reinsertion and livelihoods phase begins this year, according to UNHCR.

Repatriation From Uganda

¶19. (U) UNHCR's External Relations Officer told post that the DRC-Uganda-UNHCR Tripartite Technical Working Group continued to meet since its inception in June 2008. As of the end of December 2008, a final agreement has yet to be reached.

IDP Estimates

¶10. (U) The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center estimates that there are currently over 1.4 million IDPs in the DRC. The vast majority, approximately one million, are located in North Kivu.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) The recent LRA attacks in Dungu Territory, in reprisal for the joint Ugandan, Congolese, and Sudanese offensive, has exacerbated the humanitarian situation in the East. This variable, coupled with continued insecurity in the Kivus, threatens to reverse the 2008 gains in the net inflow of Congolese returnees.

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